1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

X 794
198
114

Arabic loanwords include:

Alla (h) - master, God, heaven
Awleya - (from Arabic "awliya", plural of waliy, saint), chief zars
Kafir - Arabic term for the Christian Ethiopians
Qwaha - coffee (from Arabic qahwa; Amharic uses "bunna"); coffee and perfume are taken over from Arabs, and are essential parts of the Zar ceremony.

Galla loanwords:

farda - Galla for horse, here meaning slave possessed by a zar; "faras", Amharic for horse, is taboo.
waqiyé yemmasgan - Waq is Galla for "God", yemmasgan is Amharic for "be praised." Total means: thank you.

There are also Woyto loanwords.

It is natural that an argot of a professional language should borrow expressions from another language with which it comes in contact....The (zar) belief might have originated with the autochthonous population of Ethiopia - the Woyto probably belong to this population - and the Amhara might have taken it over from them together with some expressions....."

X 794
198

One might add to these conclusions by Dr. Leslau that in recent years Arabic loanwords are increasingly being used in the zar argot, perhaps due to the improvement of trade routes to the Sudan. Also, the poet who must compose somewhat new poetry for special occasions in the zar cult, is the prime agent for the introduction of Arabic loanwords and usages such as addressing a powerful make zar spirit as "Prophet" (in imitation of Muslim usage).

X 794
171
174

Problems of the distribution of the "zar" and similar cults in Africa and the Middle East, such as questions as to the origin and the diffusion of the cult, are more difficult and complex.

Some linguists believe that the term "zar" is of Cushitic origin (Dr. Leslau, would seem to agree with this). This would antedate the

Hadramauti (South Arabian) colonization of Abyssinia about 2500 years ago. According to this view, the term is derived from the supreme divinity of the "pagan" Cushites, the God-heaven called "Jar" (pronounced djar) in Agau, the old-Cushitic language of Western Ethiopia [104].

The term for the zar ceremony, "wädaja" (lit. love feast) evidently is derived from the Amharic stem "wäddädä" (lit. he loved; to love), unless one concludes that both Amhara and Galla peoples derive the concept from an ancient, common Cushitic origin, the opinion of Dr. Michel Leiris [105].

The bulk of evidence would indicate a "Cushitic" origin for the zar cult. Indeed, the distribution of it and closely related cults is found most intensely in the geographical areas in which Cushitic is spoken.

Among the Cushitic-speaking Galla tribes of southern Ethiopia, Dr. Cerulli [106] found a cult of worship of similar "nature spirits", upon which the God of the conquering Abyssinians was placed later, and he infers that the same happened to the one-time sky-god of the Agau, pre-Semitic inhabitants of Cushitic-speaking northern Ethiopia. As a result, when northern Ethiopia became Christianized, the "zar", the former sky god, was demoted to a possessive spirit. Diffusion of the zar cult, Dr. Cerulli believes, was then carried by Abyssinian slaves into the Arab countries such as Egypt, the Hidjaz of Arabia and Oman, where the zar cult survives under its original name, "zar" or "sar".

104. Leslau: An Ethiopian Argot of a People Possessed by a Spirit; also Cerulli; "Zar" in Encyclopedia of Islam, 1933, p. 1217

105. Leiris, M: L'Afrique Fantôme. Paris 1934, pp. 336-7, 440.

106. Cerulli, E: Etiopia Occidentale, Vol 2, p. 35

751 their happiness from showing. Eating and drinking in the open makes one
754 extremely vulnerable, because this arouses buda's greed, and at the
776 same time makes it easier to penetrate the victim's body, through the wide open mouth and unguarded nose. Therefore, old-time Amhara cover their faces when eating in front of strangers.

751 This attempt to reduce vulnerability is closely related to some
754 of the "language of the shamma" (toga). In the presence of strangers,
291 this can be draped in the fashion that indicates "reserve" - covering the mouth, or even nose and mouth, with the front section of the toga, which has been draped in a turtleneck. When travelling in strange districts, which are doubly dangerous because of cast-out buda spirits hidden by exorcisers along trails, a strong-smelling
[824] herb pushed in the nostril, is often used as a prophylactic. The most commonly used of these herbs is "tena adam" (lit. health of Adam, i.e. mankind). The mouth should be kept closed, or covered. In a fearful situation, he may say "shadow, may it not fall on me". Touching iron, considered specially "strong", also helps. Children are warned to stay away from strangers, and never to leave a baby unattended, lest "buda will eat you". The term "eat" is regularly used for buda possession (not for zar possession), for it indicates consumption.

751 Typhus ("talalafi basheta") and severe epilepsy ("yabuda basheta")
754 the latter literally ascribed to buda (lit. buda disease) are the most
174 common ailments promptly diagnosed as "buda" "eating". Evidently
[164] Amhara doctors long ago observed that covering the mouth and nose and staying away from possibly infected strangers reduced the exposure to certain contagious diseases; they then proceeded to envelop this observation in the culture pattern, including the draping of the toga and stopping up the nose, and not eating uncovered in the presence of strangers. But they also fitted this pattern into their cosmology.

776 Foreign observers, citing early European parallels, have often
174 wondered whether the Christian Church of Abyssinia has replaced the
797 pre-Christian spirits with angels and saints, demoting the pre-Christian spirits to demons. Except for the "ganyēn" - where this attempt is still far from successful - only one foreign scholar has traced such a replacement, in Abyssinia. While studying the celebrations of the Birth of the Holy Virgin in Abyssinia, he noticed certain features which led him to think that his holiday is used to obliterate an old "pagan" cult of outdoor spirits. [127]

Thus the predominant factor is still one of syncretism.

756 E. The Characteristic Significance of Amhara Healing of the Spirit.

The Abyssinian practitioner of magic is first and predominantly a healer (with the minor exception of the despised tänqway sorcerer). He is a healer of individual patients, rather than of society.

171 Thus the social significance is at most secondary. The only
[182] exception, the "zar society", is primarily "group therapy". There is only tangential contact with political, legal, administrative institutions and their function. This is very different from the "society of sorcerers" among the Bemba of Northeast Rhodesia, who hold the people in terror and exercise political power. [128]

[794 While the "zar societies" are female-dominated in quantity of
562] members and in leadership, males are by no means excluded. They therefore differ considerably from the "female witches society" among the Nupe of Northern Nigeria. [129]

171 The only close parallel between Amhara concepts of magic and
754 other African concepts of magic is between the "buda" complex of the

127. Tubiana, J: Un Culte des Génies Agreste en Ethiopia". Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, Vol. XIII, pp. 76-90. December 1954
128. Richards, A.I.: A Modern Movement of Witchfinders. Africa, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1935
129. Nadel, S.F.: Witchcraft and Anti-Witchcraft in Nupe Society. ibid

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5
Tulama MP25

A 177

In terms of historical probability it should be emphasized that at many periods during the millennium before the Christian era Jewish influences waxed strong in the interior of Arabia and along the eastern coast of the Red Sea. There was regular intercourse between the two coasts of the Red Sea and the Aksumite kingdom on the borders of Eritrea, and the Ethiopian Highland emerged as a city-state similar in character to the city-states along the Arabian coast, and in culture more than half Semitic.

600

To the north of the Syrian area the tradition of descent from the House of Solomon grew up in the royal houses of Armenia and Georgia, after the conversion of those two countries to the Christian faith. At the same time there were very ancient colonies of Jews in Georgia and Dagistan which may well have dated back to the period of the Babylonian conquest of Israel. A later spread of Jewish influences and even of Jewish elements which may be checked historically from the works of Arab geographers took place in the ninth century A.D. among the Khazars—a Turki people who had founded a state in the northern Caucasus and along the Volga.

A 174

A similar spread of Jewish influences to the Ethiopian Highland in an earlier epoch is historically no more improbable and, in terms of geography, would have been a much easier process. The fact that the present-day Falashas are Agau-speaking indicates that the Jewish infiltration, if it took place, was at a period when Agau was generally spoken on the Ethiopian Highland.

A 563 T 105

The Gallas.—The origin of the Gallas is another of the curious mysteries of African history and the Gallas themselves remain the most significant problem of the inner politics of Ethiopia. They first appeared in Ethiopia towards the end of the sixteenth century. The country had been depopulated by the long Somali wars and by the following conflict between Catholic and Coptic Orthodox arising out of the Portuguese intervention.

During the next two centuries the Gallas swarmed over all the countryside of Ethiopia. They settled in the region of the southern lakes, which at an earlier date had been colonized by the Ethiopian Kings. They reached the Escarpment overlooking the Awash valley and the neighbourhood of Harar on the borders of the Somali country. Like the Amhara they seemed to prefer the Highland and they spread over Shoa up to the canyon of the Blue Nile and north along the ridge of the Eastern Escarpment into Amhara.

In Shoa, the Imperial province of Ethiopia, people speaking Galla represent about half the population; and over Ethiopia as a whole they probably outnumber all the other racial groups.

In the eighteenth century Galla troops proved the decisive factor in the dynastic wars which covered the period of the final disintegration of the mediaeval Empire. Galla chieftains lorded it at the decadent court of Gondar; they made and unmade Emperors and married their daughters to them. But coming as invaders, the Gallas settled as peasants. In contrast with the indolent Amhara squireens, the Gallas are industrious farmers and labourers.

At the same time the Gallas had, and have, little political consciousness or racial coherence. When, in the course of the nineteenth century, Ethiopian

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

Ethiopia. There is a special Hararene language of which an Italian society has published texts. It appears to be a corrupt mixture of Amharic and Arabic in the Amharic script. The women of Harar, in whom Somali and Galla blood predominates, are noted for their beauty. In contrast with the uniform white cotton skirts and innumerable petticoats and draperies of the frizzed Amhara ladies, the Hararenes wear a variety of bright colours and, although Moslem, they go with their faces unveiled and shoulders and bosoms exposed. Hair is worn flat in stylized curls. Their skins are often of a beautiful rose-bronze hue.

Harar is situated about 6000 feet above sea-level and its climate is one of the most equable in the world. The fertile red soil provides an abundance of the fruits of the earth and the gardens which slope down round the old walls of the city offer a variety of colour. Many pleasant hours can be spent wandering among them and talking to the cheerful friendly people. Harar is famous for its delicious coffee; and the donkeys of the district of Mount Condudo, which rises to 9000 feet some 20 miles to the east of Harar, are reputed to be the finest in Ethiopia. The jackasses of Condudo are much sought after for the procreation of mules, and the whole life of the Ethiopian Highland still depends on the mule.

The Ethiopian Highland lies in close proximity to two of the oldest routes along which have passed the commerce and the changing cultures of men: the Red Sea and the Nile. Yet the Ethiopian Highland and its peoples have remained remote. The same conditions of history apply to the Riffian Atlas overlooking the Straits into the Mediterranean and to the great Caucasian massif which flanks the ways round the Black Sea and across the Caspian.

The presence of varied racial elements in mountain areas has generally been explained as the remnants of former peoples who have been driven up into the hills as fugitives. This may be in part true. Yet I am inclined to believe that the mountains have been rather the human reservoirs from which successive floods of men have poured down, like the spring waters, into the neighbouring lowlands. There are many historical examples of this process. In Moorish history successive dynasties were recruited from the mountain Berbers and it was the Berbers who provided the man-power for the Moslem conquest of Spain. The function of the Albanians in repopulating a devastated Greece was remarked by the historian Finlay; and they have for centuries contributed numerous and warlike elements to the populations of the Near East. The same role was played by Caucasian mountaineers in both the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, in Egypt, and in Persia. Mountain peoples generally breed in excess of the capacity of the terrain to support their offspring.

I submit, then, that the Ethiopian Highlands represented just such a reservoir of primitive human material—a reservoir which must have made an important contribution, in prehistoric times, to the peopling of the Nile basin. In fact the Ethiopian Highland and the Moroccan Atlas, with the intervening massifs which rise out of the Sahara, like Jebel Adrar, Tibesti, and Darfur, may well have been the primitive homeland of the Hamitic-

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

speaking peoples, who have contributed such an important element to the populations of the Mediterranean basin.[1]

I believe that the early civilized world of the valleys: Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus, which has been revealed by the researches and explorations of the last century had its background in the great ranges from which its peoples came. Professor Toynbee has pointed out that the regions of the Nile and the Mesopotamian valleys must have been areas of unhealthy swamp and wilderness when men first settled there.[2] Such terrain would not produce the conditions necessary to stimulate the multiplication of an indigenous stock: A terrain of this type would rather need clearing and developing by immigrants forced to find their living there after having been driven down from mountain areas by the pressure of increased numbers on food, which we have seen is a common characteristic of mountain economy. But just as the Highland migrant working in the field of American industrialism soon acquires new techniques and develops a higher standard of material culture than his brother who remains a crofter in Scotland, so the colonists of the Nile and Mesopotamian valleys far outpaced in material culture the inhabitants of the remote highlands of Ethiopia or of the Zagros and the Taurus.

There is one last point: the eighteenth-century prejudice against mountains, which influence still remains, tended to an exaggeration of the difficulties of mountain travel in primitive times. Yet the higher ridges of mountain chains often are the easiest lines of movement for men on foot. It makes possible the avoidance of forested valleys and ravines blocked by undergrowth and full of fevers. In England even our earliest forebears kept to the Downlands and trudged along the ridges to keep clear of the thick undergrowth and swamps of the low ground. And the so-called Alpine peoples kept to the mountain belt as they penetrated westward into Europe from the Highlands of Asia Minor through the Balkans to the Alps and the Pyrenees.

In this connection it is possible to appreciate the essential importance of Aksum as an early cultural centre. Aksum is at the northern head of the route along the great Eastern Escarpment which leads into the heart of the Ethiopian Highland; at the same time Aksum is within easy reach of the Red Sea and the affluents which lead down to the Nile valley. There is a theory that the monoliths at Aksum are in fact the remains of a great Megalithic centre; the historic Aksumites merely made their own sculptural additions to the stone monuments which they already found in situ.[3] If we accept this theory we can see Aksum as a great centre of early megalithic culture having its connections with the reputed megalithic remains noted by recent Italian travellers in the region of the southern lakes.

[1] Abbé Morié, 'Histoire de l'Ethiopie,' vol. 1. Ethiopia was a term applied by ancient writers loosely and varyingly to all the northern half of Africa between the Atlantic and the Red Sea, and the term was even extended to Caucasian Colchis and to India. In fact mythical Ethiopia covered all that width of Africa and Asia where the Neolithic cultures first appeared. In classical times the name Ethiopia was applied to Nubia and the Sudan and it was only in post-Christian times that it was limited to the Highland area of modern Ethiopia.

[2] A. Toynbee, 'The study of history,' vols. 1/2.

[3] Sir E. H. W. Budge, chapter on Aksum in vol. II 'History of Ethiopia.'

2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

travellers in the region of the southern lakes.[1] Other and earlier cultures may well have percolated into the Highland by the same routes along the ridges which are established for the mediaeval Copto-Ethiopian culture.

I am afraid I have put before the Society some rather hazardous lines of inquiry, with implications which necessarily impose a great deal of comparative study before they can be established or disproved. My excuse in these days when no one has the leisure to pursue exacting studies is that it is worth putting on record lines of inquiry which some of us may be able to turn to at a later date.

All photographs, unless acknowledged, were taken by the late Captain Mark Pilkington.

DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (the Rt. Hon. Sir GEORGE CLERK) said: Captain Allen has been well known to us in the past as an authority on Georgia and as the author of an excellent history of the Ukraine. Military duty took him to Ethiopia for the operations which restored the Emperor Haile Selassie to his throne and capital—operations in which others of our Fellows, particularly Colonel Orde Wingate, Major Hugh Boustead, and Mr. Wilfred Thesiger, took a prominent part. Some day when the war is over I hope that the story of the Abyssinian campaign will come out, because not only is it in many ways a fantastic story, but it makes a very fine chapter in our annals.

It has been a little difficult for Captain Allen to prepare his paper for this evening, first of all because nearly all his photographs were left behind in Africa, and secondly, because his military duties have given him very little time to get his paper into shape. We look forward to hearing the impressions which the country and people of the Ethiopian Highlands have made upon him in the course of his military duties.

Captain Allen then read the paper printed above

The PRESIDENT: The lecture this evening has stirred memories of forty years ago. The lecturer talked about those miles of red-hot pokers. I have always held that if you give Nature a chance she is the best gardener in the world. I came once over a plateau in Abyssinia, a bit of waste country where no white man had ever been before, and there I found a great sheet of red-hot pokers and rosemary: the masses of orange-scarlet flowers backed by the grey-mauve of the rosemary were wonderfully beautiful. It finished in a sort of marsh in which there were immense stretches of white and scarlet arum lilies, inconceivably spectacular.

The lecturer has described the good manners and charm of the Shoan Abyssinians, but it is true that they are very quick to take offence as well as to show affection; they are very volatile. What he said about the Tigraians was also true; they are the tough northerners, more dependable, but not so easy to get on with. I will give you an instance of the funny though rather charming ways of the Abyssinians. Forty years ago I was on a certain expedition with a so-called Abyssinian army: two thousand scallywags, with two thousand small boys to carry their rifles, and two thousand unfortunate second wives to carry their food. We descended the escarpment to the west, and came into populated country. The Abyssinian soldiers were living on the country, and here they started to be extremely tiresome. I had to chase them off the inhabitants and

[1] See 'Africa Orientale,' Italiana Guida, published by Touring Club Italiana, 1939.

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

These figures show that the gorges, together with the adjoining and intervening plateau, carry a considerably higher population than the rest of the plateau, the combined average being over 200 per square mile. The figures for population per church are also interesting. The gorges and the adjacent parts of the plateau contain no fewer than thirteen churches and they serve an average population of only some 650 souls each. On the other hand the churches of the general plateau, not counting those of Debra Berhan, which chiefly serve the townspeople, number only four. They must cater for about three times as many people each, and until recently many more for two of them are recent foundations.

The higher population of the gorge region is attributable to two causes: the greater productivity of the land there, and the historical fact, already referred to, that the Amharas were long forced to live in the gorges, and have re-emerged only in recent times. This is confirmed by the evidence of the churches which, in such numbers, are sure evidence of a long-established Christian population. The oldest ones are among those in the depths of the gorges; sites on the edges of gorges seem to be more recent. The few plateau churches are all relatively modern and bespeak the re-occupation by Amharas; two of them were indeed founded within the last fifteen years, and one as recently as 1945.

As can be seen from the map, sites chosen for dwellings are usually on the higher ground. The favourite sites, of which many examples can be seen on the sheet, are rocky ridges and the tops or upper slopes of hills and minor plateaus. A high place with an outlook, together with reasonable proximity to permanent water, seem to be the conditions sought after. Even the most elevated and exposed hill-tops are generally inhabited, whereas nobody tries to live on the plains near the main streams, which become very swampy in the rains. The ordinary family, together with its domestic animals, lives in a small, irregular cluster of round huts, which in this area are built of stone cemented with mud and carry a conical thatched roof. They are surrounded, as a rule, by a dry-stone wall, which may be shared by several households. Richer people may have an ornamental gatehouse at the main entry, with a little watchman's room over the gate; but such ostentation was not common.

Disregarding some of the Debra Berhan people, almost the entire population is engaged in farming which, here as elsewhere in Ethiopia, is the mainstay of existence. Some possess their own land; others hold their plots, in return for a proportion of the produce (but without any security of tenure), from absentee landowners. There is also a landless element, greatly increased through the disturbing influence of the Italian occupation, who hire themselves out as ploughmen and labourers. I had intended to measure some typical holdings in order to estimate the area actually required to support a family, but my time in the area was cut short and I never did so. As a very rough estimate I think that about 15–20 per cent. of the area is under cultivation in any one year, which would indicate an average per family of something like 4 acres. This does not include fallow land which, once re-grown with grass, cannot be distinguished at a glance from permanent pasture.

The most exposed parts of the plateau near Debra Berhan will grow two crops only, barley and broad beans, but a limited amount of wheat (a bearded

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

Ethiopic verse becomes most obscure in the figure known as *wesṭa wayrā* ("inside of olive tree"). Here only the wax is given, and the listener must work to unearth the gold. Often this can be done only when the circumstances under which the verse was made up are known. The author of a *wesṭa wayrā* often refuses to reveal anything that may help the listener to grasp its hidden meaning.

The expression *wesṭa wayrā* alludes to the fact that the inner core of the olive tree is a hard substance encased by bark of a different color. The implication is that the inner sense of a *wesṭa wayrā* poem is concealed by a veneer which conveys a quite different sense and is difficult to penetrate. This figure is thus especially suitable for expressing insults in a safe way and for esoteric philosophical or religious message. Here is an instance of the latter usage:

Ya-bāhetāwi lĭjj sifalleg le'ullennā
Ya-kristosn mesht talānt washama-nnā
Qeṭal betābalaw hono qarama-nnā.

The son of a hermit, high rank to display,
Made love with Christ's wife yesterday;
When she fed him leaves he wasted away.

The surface meaning of this tercet describes an ambitious man who had relations with "Christ's wife" in order to raise his status, for in Ethiopia having relations with a woman of high rank is one way to gain prestige. Instead of advancing his position, however, this man lost all his power when the woman fed him (medicinal) leaves. The esoteric meaning, on the other hand, refers to the experience of a hermit. His "son" is intended to symbolize his hunger, and "Christ's wife" symbolizes fasting. The "inside" meaning, the gold, is therefore that the hermit's hunger is heightened by its relations with fasting, but it diminishes when he is fed leaves, the hallowed diet of a hermit.

The mode of the various poetic figures collectively designated as *sam-ennā warq* is intellectual rather than sensuous. The chief delight of Ethiopic poetry is to attain a maximum of thought with a minimum of words. This effect is reached, as we have seen, through subtle allusions and plays on words. The point may be a serious moral comment, the understanding of which requires one to decipher hidden references to biblical passages or sacred legends; or it may be a jest about love based on a pornographic pun. In any case, the more ingeniously compact and obscure the construction of the verse, the more pleased will be the poet and his audience. Weighty (i.e., mysterious) verse is the ideal, for as the Amhara say, "weighty verse, like heavy clothing, warms the insides."

The creation of the wax and gold figures was an integral part of the development of *qenē*, the genre of verse composed to be sung at the conclusion of devotional services in the church. And *qenē* appears to be a specifically

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

538 Amhara invention. Though exact documentation is not available on the mat-
19 ter, *qenē* appears to be one of the flowers of the literary renascence which
• 174 took place during the centuries following the ascendance of the Solomonid
[175] Dynasty. The earliest specimens of *qenē* extant date back to the reign of
[173] Emperor Eskender (1478–94).[6] Ethiopian traditions trace the invention of
[874] *qenē* to the work of a man named Tawānay, who is said to have lived in Gojjam in the fourteenth century.[7] The important schools of *qenē* have always been located in Amhara country, primarily at the monasteries of Wā-
538 delā, Wāsharā, and Gonj in Gojjam Province. While the choristers of Tigre
19 have long since mastered the canons of *qenē* composition in Ge'ez, the use
[171] of wax and gold in the vernacular occurs much more often in Amharic than in Tigrinya. Indeed, wax and gold is so important in Amharic that some Amhara maintain that one does not properly speak the language unless he is well versed in the art of exploiting its numerous ambiguities. One of the
[829] more common indictments of Tigre character by Amhara is that the Tigre are "dry" (*daraq*); they say just what they feel and do not know how to be ambiguous. Conversely, many Tigre as well as other non-Amhara people in the empire complain about the excess of symbolism and subtlety in Amhara discourse.

538 Educated Amhara traditionalists extol wax and gold as a unique creation of their culture. One of them has written that *qenē* is as distinctive of Ethiopia's spiritual culture as *tēff*, a species of grass grown as a cereal grain only in Ethiopia, is distinctive of her material culture.[8] They further maintain that Ge'ez *qenē* contains a unique kind of wisdom, dark and deep. Instruction in this occult art of verse composition has traditionally been regarded as propaedeutic to the study of religious texts.* Partly this is because Ge'ez grammar, which must be known in order to understand these texts, is normally taught only in the schools of *qenē*. The more philosophical reason given, however, is that by affording exercise in fathoming secrets it "opens the mind" and thereby enhances the student's ability to approach the divine mysteries.

538 Important as such functions may be in the high culture of Ethiopia, wax
181 and gold represents more than a principle of poetic composition and a method of spiritual gymnastics for a small class of literati. The ambiguity symbolized by the formula *sam-ennā warq* colors the entire fabric of traditional Amhara life. It patterns the speech and outlook of every Amhara. When he talks, his

538 * The course of instruction in *qenē* takes from two to five years, according to the talent of the
874 student and the degree of mastery he desires. Ge'ez grammar and *qenē* prosody are taught side by
876 side. The former, usually studied in the evening, is learned by rote. The latter is taught by running the student step by step through the gamut of figures and stanza forms. Instruction by example begins in the dark, before sunrise. The teacher extemporizes on a given theme in each of the stanza forms. His productions are memorized and discussed. In the daytime each student goes off by himself to a secluded place and composes one stanza. When finished—it may take him all day to perfect a couplet—he recites it to the master, who makes appropriate critical comments.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

heaven, *samāy*, the abode of supernatural beings and the souls of the dead. The earth is seen as flat, though some believe its shape to be square, others think it is round like a disc, and still others imagine it to extend without limit. That the terrain of Ethiopia is so obviously not flat is explained by reference to the great flood, after which the parts which dried quickly became highlands (*dēgā*), the parts slow to dry becoming lowlands (*qolā*). The peasant explains the greater heat of the lowlands by saying that they receive less wind than the highlands.

Beneath the earth's surface is an obscure area called *maq*, a depth to which the bodies of evildoers drop after burial. There is also a large subterranean ocean, *weqniyānos*, into which all the rivers and lakes on earth descend. The earth itself is held up, according to some, by a Y-shaped piece of wood; according to others, by two serpents; still another view is that no support is needed other than the will of God, as the saying indicates:

> Ay, My God! Lord who stretched forth the heavens without a pillar, and the earth without tent-pegs.

The rotation of the sun *above* the earth causes the alternation of night and day. The imagery of this rotation is that of someone going home at night and coming out in the morning. Attitudes toward the sun are quite ambivalent. The sun is appreciated for dispersing the morning chill and for causing seed to germinate, but it is feared as a source of sickness and death.*

The moon is highly regarded, which is probably a vestige of pre-Christian moon worship. At the Ethiopian latitude the moon is functional, for its bright illumination facilitates night travel, especially desirable in the hotter regions. Beyond this, the moon is considered a powerful agent. It is chief of the sky, commander of an army of stars and it is the force which causes crops to grow after the sun has brought forth seedlings.

In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies. Known both as the "kingdom of heaven" and "paradise"—terms which refer to quite different spheres in the Orthodox cosmology but are fused in the vulgar mind—it is regarded as a home where food and clothes are plentiful and freely distributed. To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called *Si'ol* (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned). This treatment of the damned is made worse by alternate dippings in icy water, though some believe that the wicked souls get a respite from their tortures on weekends.

---

* The TAT's revealed a great dread of the sun; nearly every respondent interpreted one or another of the cards in terms of the sun's dangerousness.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

demonstrate some affiliation with the Solomonic line; the marriage of one of these into a local dynasty contributed an added buttress to its traditionalist claims. The other was what seems to be a still more deeply rooted disposition for decentralized hegemony based on the ancient character of the society. For, as Cerulli has recently suggested, the origins of the Ethiopian state were such as to lay the foundation for a persisting order of feudalism. The movement of South Arabs to the Eritrean coast and highlands took place, not through the conquest of an indigenous population by a united invader, as in the Norman Conquest of England, but by the intermittent emigration and settlement of distinct tribes from South Arabia into various parts of the African territory. Thus, Cerulli concludes, we see in Ethiopia "a feudalism expanded from the roots: a number of principalities or peoples which, independent on African land after their emigration, have finally been regrouped in a higher political unity, yet still conserving in the feudal system thus constituted part of their autonomy and their individuality."[37] If this is so, it would constitute an added traditional element in the sense of legitimacy of local dynastic interests.

All this suggests that we must look to two sources for the prestige of the *makuännent*—that recruitment into the secular elite came from "below" as well as from "above." These two bases of noble status are indicated by the etymology of two Amharic words commonly applied to the local nobility, *shum* and *bälabbät*. *Shum* (or *seyum*) comes from a root which means to invest with high position. The emperor, as we have seen, is *seyuma egziabhër* ("invested by God") and he in turn is the source of authority for investing other dignitaries. The status associated with the word *shum* is therefore based on the act of investiture by a sovereign. *Bälabbät*, on the other hand, has the literal meaning, "one who has a father"; in other words, one who has a significant father, a notable ancestry. This status refers to claims to deference which are based on birth.

Claims based on birth, moreover, were closely tied to the ownership of land and supported by local territorial allegiances. This appears most strikingly in the office of *çhïqä shum*, the lowest level official, who is appointed, to be sure, but by the local people themselves from a small number of *bälabbät* whose eligibility for the office rests on their inheritance of rights to certain specified pieces of land. Other local offices, like *malkaña* and *meslanë*, were normally given by regional governors to *bälabbät* indigenous to the area. The sacred sentiment of fealty to a monarch, whose charisma rested both on membership in a hallowed dynasty and the hallowed act of coronation, thus competed in Abyssinian souls with deeply felt sentiments of attachment to members of noted families who symbolized local rights and traditions. Abyssinian political structure at any given time was determined by the relative strength of the forces supported by these two principles of legitimacy.

Neither principle was ever realized in pure form. No matter how great his